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CLEAN WATER FOR THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST

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CLEAN WATER | *for the Pacific Northwest*

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Till taught by pain
Men really know not what good water's worth. Byron.

Clean Water for the Pacific Northwest

We who live along the mighty Columbia and Puget Sound can sense the greatness of our future all about us. Our magnificent mountains, broad prairies, surging streams and towering trees thrill residents and visitors alike. Our Pacific Northwest is unbelievably rich—an everlasting source of unlimited natural wealth, if properly conserved.

But the greatness of our future, and the harvest of all this wealth, hang on a single resource: ***Water.***

No longer do we depend on water merely for drinking, watering beasts of the field, and perhaps a few crops as in primitive times. Today we have an infinite number of uses for water—uses that are essential to our welfare and progress—uses that thread throughout the fabric of our complex civilization, holding it together.

Some of our most important uses of water today are industrial. Water is industry's largest raw commodity; without sufficient supplies of good, clean water, industry cannot function. That is one of the reasons why industries of the future, like atomic energy, have come to our Northwest. We have water, a lot of it.

The Columbia and its branches carry the greatest undeveloped water potential in the United States, greater even than the Mississippi or Missouri. If preserved for our full use, and not destroyed or wasted, this resource guarantees our destiny.

Water Pollution the Destroyer

Most Americans have not yet realized that water pollution is the greatest single destroyer of our water resources. Pollution is

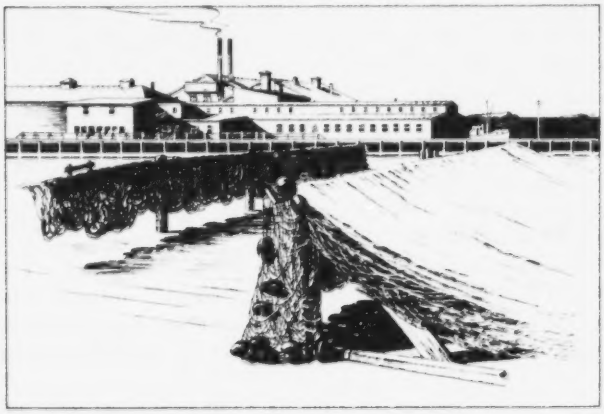
a cancer that comes with the expansion and concentration of population, industry, and agriculture. It grows with neglect, rendering more and more of our water useless. In effect, pollution can destroy water and all that depends on it.

Here in our young, growing Northwest we have almost overlooked this fact. We have awakened only recently to this danger which threatens our future. We have permitted water pollution to spread disease, damage our unsurpassed recreation areas, destroy our fish and wildlife, and hamper our cities, industry, and agriculture.

To preserve the full usefulness of our waters, we must rid ourselves of the pollution now beginning to damage them; we must bring water pollution under control.

Three Kinds of Pollution

The evil of water pollution takes three forms: Municipal, industrial, and agricultural. Municipal pollution consists chiefly of sewage—body wastes and other materials from our homes, commercial buildings, etc. It can be eliminated or lessened by treatment. Waste treatment plants can render harmless the tremendous volume of sewage and other waste that must be disposed of somehow, somewhere, by our cities.



Pacific Northwest Fish Cannery.

Industries discharge chemicals, oils, acids, emulsions, and decomposing organic refuse into our waterways. Most of these can also be treated to reduce their damaging effects. Some can be recovered as useful by-products. Lumbering debris, mining, and ore concentration mill waste present special problems.

Industrial pollution does not usually carry waterborne disease such as typhoid, dysentery, enteritis, and cholera. But some of it is deadly, killing fish almost on contact. It sometimes attains gigantic proportions; for example, nine of our sulphite mills have been dumping waste which does damage equal to the untreated sewage from 8 million persons (our total population is less than 5 million). Public pressure has brought about an official order to these mills to lessen this destruction of water. Several have already done so.

Agricultural pollution consists mainly of soil washed from farms, roadways, and other bared land, and of irrigation salts. Solving this problem will require years of effort by farmers, soil conservationists, and others.

Our Waste Treatment Record

We have seen that our municipal and industrial pollution problems can be solved by building plants to treat wastes before they are discharged. Are these plants being built?

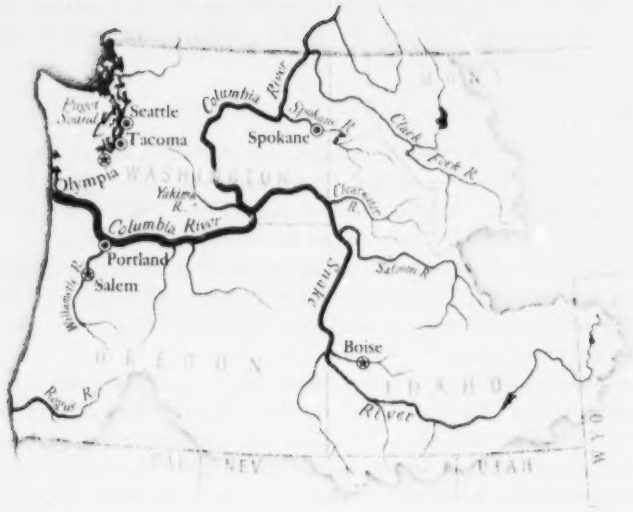
A report on Pacific Northwest water pollution by State water pollution control agencies cooperating with the Public Health Service sums up our treatment situation as follows:

"Although more than 1,200 municipal and industrial sources of pollution exist in the Pacific Northwest, less than one-third are known to be provided with waste treatment facilities."

Actually, only 23 percent of the people here in the Pacific Northwest who are served by sewers have facilities that ensure proper sewage treatment.

Of our four largest cities only one—Portland—has a plant in operation that will eventually treat all its sewage. Tacoma treats about half its sewage. Spokane has no treatment but has definite plans for treating all its waste. Seattle plans treatment of only about 20 percent.

As for our industries, only a few have full scale waste treatment facilities.



The Consequences

In the Upper and Central Snake River valleys in Idaho, and the Yakima valley in Washington, unusually high rates of intestinal disease have been reported. Public health officials believe that irrigation water contaminated with sewage is a contributing factor.

Our beautiful island-studded Puget Sound has received great volumes of raw city sewage and industrial waste, equal to the sewage from over 6 million persons. The Sound is not only beginning to lose the attractiveness that drew millions of tourists but becoming a menace to life and health.

Pollution has already forced closure of several valuable shellfish areas in the Sound and along Washington and Oregon coasts. Bathing and vacationing areas have suffered also.

Consequences such as these, multiplied many times, warn us of what to expect if we allow pollution to go unchecked.

In the Columbia only the great volume of water has saved us thus far. But water can absorb only a certain amount of waste; and the volume of waste discharged by our fast-expanding population and industry is constantly on the increase.

We are faced with a situation something like the one that dismayed Alice in *Through the Looking Glass*. We have to run faster to stay where we are.

A Cure

The Pacific Northwest pollution report shows that we require more than 300 new municipal waste treatment projects, 15 of them for cities of over 20,000, three for cities of over 100,000, one for a city of over 400,000, and the rest for smaller communities.

Although information on industrial needs is far from complete, we know at least 67 industrial waste treatment plant projects are required; undoubtedly we shall find that we need many more when we have more data.

Pollution will not—cannot—abate itself. Only you and I, the citizens of the Northwest, can do this. How? By enlisting the support of our neighbors, of sportsmen, and others; by advising our elected officials of our interest in pollution abatement—only thus can we assure success. The cost of waste treatment is usually less than the cost of a postage stamp per person per day.

The Columbia and our other waters are our lifeblood. To continue to prosper, we must cleanse them. When our matchless common heritage of water is usefully clean again, and shining under the sun . . . then once more our future will be clear—and sure.

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